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SUBJECT: EXAMINING OPTIONS FOR BAGHDAD'S DISPLACED PERSONS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: RefCoords conducted a series of visits to informal settlements of internally displaced persons (IDPs) around Baghdad province on February 9, 10, 11 and 15. The visits reaffirmed the need to take a tailored, multi-faceted approach to create durable solutions for the estimated 180,000 IDPs living in squalid conditions in Baghdad's IDP settlements. Other key takeaways: the "Diyala returns model" of coordinated interventions may have some applicability in rural Baghdad areas; some IDPs facing difficult conditions may be open to returns but know little of the current conditions in their original neighborhoods; almost all of the IDPs encountered in Baghdad were renters without strong ties to their districts of record and have economic and security reasons for remaining where they are; most IDPs prefer resettlement or local integration but would require access to government lands; our partners should work harder to be present in support of some of the most vulnerable clusters we visited. Problems of government engagement were apparent and will be a key to future success in finding durable solutions. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) With strong support from U.S. Division-Center, the Baghdad PRT, and embedded PRTs at bases around the Baghdad governorate, Senior Refugee and IDP Coordinator, Assistance RefCoord, Baghdad PRT Deputy Team Leader, and others, visited sites in Khadamiya (northwest Baghdad), Mada'in (southwest Baghdad), southern Karradah (southwest Baghdad), and Doura (southern Baghdad) from February 9-15. Sites around Baghdad have important differences, with the best showing government pavement of streets and installation of electrical systems (as in el Sadiq in Mada'in) and others highlighting the urban poverty found in many developing world slums, with large mounds of partially burned garbage, pools of raw sewage, and crumbling houses made of mud brick, shards of metal, wood and plastic (as in Doura and Karradah). In all settlements, residents described the threats and violence that forced them to flee and frustration with government authorities who lacked interest in their condition. The following paragraphs summarize other main conclusions and themes, the result of in-depth interviews with IDPs and local officials:

Diyala in Baghdad?

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¶3. (SBU) The "Diyala returns model" of coordinated interventions of housing, livelihoods and services by multiple agencies may have some applicability in rural districts of the Baghdad governorate. In Mada'in, a rural district southwest of the Baghdad municipality, the Khazaliya 1 and 2 villages were flattened by sectarian violence after 2006. The 430 families villages are mostly IDP returnees, and about 50% of those who fled have not returned yet, according to representatives with the embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team (ePRT) based in Mada'in. Many potential returnees own land there. The village profile is similar to those we have targeted in Diyala: a population willing to return, widespread destruction, an agricultural base. The ePRT and USAID, working with a local non-governmental organization in the two settlements, have focused on providing agricultural assistance in the villages, using several

Quick Response Fund (QRF) grants and USAID's Community Action Program III (CAP III). The Mada'in district government has pledged to pave the road there. Comment: Our initial assessment is that in Khazaliya, and perhaps other areas of Mada'in district, we could work with our partners to bring additional assistance to destroyed villages to create durable solutions. End Comment.

So Close, Yet So Far...from Home

14. (SBU) Some IDPs facing difficult conditions may be open to returns but know little of the current conditions in their original neighborhoods. RefCoords visits showed that IDPs usually were living just 5-10 miles from their former homes, though they had never travelled back to them. Notably, almost all of this migration was into areas closer to the Baghdad city center. The Musa al-Khadim cluster in the beladiyah (sub-district) of Khadamiya, in northwest Baghdad, is home to 1,200 IDP families. It is a dilapidated former Iraqi Army base where mainly Shi'a families moved between 2006 and 2008. A large number of these families fled nearby west Baghdad neighborhoods of Hasswa, Khazaliya, Abu Ghraib, and Tarmiya as a result of threats and violence against Shi'a. The same was true in other clusters: In el Sadiq, in Mada'in district, 410 of the site's 420-460 families had fled the Balad Ruz district of Diyala province, about 20 miles away. At the site visited in Doura district, families had fled from the district of Mahmoudiya, directly south by less than 15 miles. Comment: Post believes that a visitation program to their former areas of residence could be arranged with a number of the IDPs mentioned above. End Comment.

The Renters' Dilemma

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15. (SBU) A visitation program noted above would immediately run into a singular problem: the fact that the vast majority of the IDPs encountered in Baghdad had been renters before they fled. They described both economic and security reasons for their intention to remain where they are. In Rustimiya, in southern Karadah district in southeast Baghdad, a site next to a current Iraqi Army (IA) base, residents were living among large heaps of garbage in crumbling mud homes. Nearly all were renters or had sold their homes in Diyala province where they had fled sectarian violence. Most disliked their current location, but because many residents could work at the IA base next door or in the newly active industrial areas nearby, most felt they had nowhere else to go. "Why would we want to stay here? This place isn't even fit for animals," expressed one resident. The need to discover a solution at Rustimiya is urgent because the IA has expressed a need to retake the land in order to expand, and the IDPs expect to have to depart at some time in the near future. (Note: Almost all of IDPS settlements visited exist on land owned by the GOI, either the Finance Ministry or Ministry of Defense, which are the two largest landholders in Iraq. End Note). Some IDPs at Rustimiya expressed a reluctant willingness to move anywhere they might be provided land and homes.

Government Engagement Lacking

16. (SBU) The option of obtaining land grants for IDPs is politically sensitive, and government authorities have been unwilling to entertain donation of it as an option to date, despite the existence of large amounts of land around Baghdad owned by the GOI. Part of their concern -- expressed by Baghdad Governor Salah Abdel-Razzaq in a December meeting with Assistance RefCoord -- is that providing land or providing any benefits to IDPs at settlements may create new sectarian tensions in new areas. Others also worry that donating land -- or providing other assistance for that matter -- at current IDP sites may create a pull factor that brings more IDPs or squatters into the city seeking benefits. Complicating matters more is the fact that national elections on March 7 and government

formation over the ensuing several months mean the GOI will be unlikely to make important decisions on displacement issues in the near future.

17. (SBU) GOI engagement to date in Baghdad has been limited: Ninety percent of Baghdad's IDPs are able to access at least partial food rations, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as medical and educational facilities. This access is consistent with what RefCoords viewed during their visits. However, many IDPs interviewed stated they had missed the deadline to register as IDPs and had never been provided assistance or informed of available services by GOI authorities. (Note: MODM has registered about 45% of all IDPs in Baghdad, and provided 18% with return grants, according to IOM. Visits by Refugees International representatives over the last two weeks also suggested that a high percentage of IDPs may be registered with MoDM, even if they have not yet had access to MoDM grants. End note). This assistance gap a source of strong IDP resentment. During a heated meeting with the Khadamiya District Council, in northwest Baghdad, IDP representatives stormed out in protest after shouting at their representatives that, while the U.S. government cared about their problems, GOI representatives did not. The argument erupted when the Khadamiya DC, who admitted never having visited their settlements, opposed the idea of providing land grants to allow IDPs to stay where they were. In Khazaliya, Mada'in district, meanwhile, PRT representatives noted that government approvals of PRT or military proposed projects take weeks or months to be approved, needlessly delaying urgently needed projects for which funding has already been identified. Comment: RefCoords will continue to engage at the district and governorate district level, and are planning an event with Baghdad's District Council IDP representatives in the near future. End Comment.

Pushing our Partners

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18. (SBU) Our partners should work harder to be present in support of some of the most vulnerable clusters we visited. At all of the settlements RefCoords visited, we were unable to detect a significant UNHCR presence. At the settlement of el-Sadiq, with some 420 families from Diyala province, the UNHCR team assigned to the area could not remember having provided assistance there, despite its relatively large size. RefCoord also had difficulty obtaining an accurate grid coordinate from UNHCR for the site. Other sites in need of assistance, where IDPs were not registered

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with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, where health and sanitation issues appeared urgent, and where many children do not go to school, need greater involvement of both our partners and government authorities. Comment: On February 12, RefCoords reviewed our impressions with the UNHCR Representative Daniel Endres, stressing the need for UNHCR RICCs and PACs to be much more engaged in outreach to the populations they serve. Endres took the points very much to heart and conveyed the concerns to UNHCR staff. Endres said the organization is now working on a plan to rationalize the PAC and RICC structures and, following separate monitoring meetings with RefCoord, is also working on a 2010 monitoring and evaluation framework that includes outcome and impact indicators. End Comment.

Comment

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19. (SBU) While temporary assistance must remain a key part of our efforts in Baghdad, RefCoords see opportunities for durable solutions. As in Diyala, we found destroyed villages that our partners can help reconstruct. We identified locations where carefully developed visitation programs could give IDPs hope of starting new lives. Of course, any solutions must be carefully tailored to the individuals in question; given their different circumstances, we must take a "retail" approach to every site in Baghdad. Our biggest challenge -- and the biggest opportunity -- lies in the GOI's donation of some of its vast land holdings to

these populations. Although the GOI is unable to consider such solutions now given the upcoming election and transition, we can and will begin developing policy recommendations and identifying allies -- particularly at the district level -- who can prepare the ground for the next government. In the meantime, we should urge our partners to engage more vigorously around Baghdad and advocate with the GOI to retain humanitarian access to this huge population, ensuring they are not forcefully relocated by the GOI until durable solutions can be implemented. Access may become particularly salient for RefCoord and our partners as U.S. forces drawdown, reducing our mobility. End Comment.